

## **High School Life**

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Some think today's high school students have it easy with many owning their own cars, computers, cell phones and their biggest responsibility being homework. Just how hard is it to be a high-school student today, and have things changed much over the years? To answer this, we will compare the high school experiences of two southern Illinois girls, Rosie Stern, Class of 1948 and Krista Frey, Class of 2005.

Nearly sixty years have passed since Rosie's school days, but her memories are amazingly clear. Rosie attended Granite City High from 1944 through 1948. Unlike the early 1940s, a time when rationing of goods such as food, gas, and tires was necessary and the impact of World War II curtailed normal living, the mid-to late-1940s were an easier time for many. Rosie was a good student, graduating in the top ten percent of her class. She proudly recalls being one of the first females accepted in drafting class. Her favorite subjects were history and literature, she especially enjoyed studying the classics including Shakespeare, and she tells of reading his works alone when only twelve if she could get a hold of her brothers' books.

Her least favorite course was Advanced Algebra, but one would think that Rosie might have liked it better if she could have used a calculator like students today. She said there was little technology available, except for adding machines and typewriters that could be rented from the local bookstore, Grahams. Although an excellent student, Rosie

could not attend college. She describes her family as being "rather poor" saying that that "most of us had little chance of attending college unless our families were well off". She added that because of the G.I. Bill following World War II, many young men were able to continue their educations.

Krista attends Metro East Lutheran High in Edwardsville and will also graduate in the top ten percent of her class next May. Her favorite subjects include Religion, Physics, and Calculus. Having the benefit of modern technology like her computer and calculator to assist her in these higher-level courses, she would not want to think about completing them without this help, Krista is going to college next fall as will over 90% of her graduating class.

The end of World War II made for a strong economy, bringing industrial expansion and housing development to Granite. In 1948, Granite City Steel broke all production records in the company's long history. Rosie describes her high school days this way, "I don't recall worrying about much. Jobs were plentiful. Housing was being upgraded. WWII had ended, and we had not yet gotten involved in Korea. Our biggest worry was clothes and getting married." By today's standards, Rosie did not live in luxury. Still recovering from the Depression, her family lived in a four-family flat until her senior year when, with her and several of her siblings working, her family was able to buy a seven-room house contract for deed. "Five girls shared two bedrooms, and there was always competition for first bath and first use of the ironing board for dates. We had a radio and phonograph but no television."

Edwardsville, Krista's community, is also experiencing a strong economy, with much housing and business growth. Krista describes her family as middle class, and like many of her friends she has her own room equipped with a computer, television, VCR, DVD player, and telephone. She loves attending her small, Christian high school but probably would not describe high school as being quite so worry free as Rosie. During her freshman year, September 11, 2001, terrorists attacked our nation. In addition to this concern, Krista worries about her 22-year old cousin who has been diagnosed with cancer.

During Rosie's high school years, she and all girls were by law forbidden from participation in competitive sports. She did play in the school band, something she said she was not all that good at but enjoyed nevertheless. "Many students worked. The local hospital hired many teenagers, as did Woolworths and Newberry's Dime Store. . . . "I worked for Southwestern Bell from the age of 16" said Rosie. It was supposed to be summer work, but they persuaded her to stay throughout the school year (28 hours one week / 32 the next. She was a telephone operator, being promoted to supervisor the week of high school graduation, a career she continued until her retirement 35 years later). Between work and maintaining grades, Rose had little time to date but enjoyed her limited time hanging out with friends. She loved riding the streetcar to St. Louis to go to theaters and to shop at Famous Barr, with her favorite places to shop for clothes being Carp's in Granite City and Garland's in St. Louis. "There was no dress code [at school], but everybody tried to outdo one another in dressing stylishly. . . . Sweaters and skirts were the norm. A string of pearls were a fashion must."

She said that while many tried drinking, drugs were really rare, and violence was almost unknown in schools.

Unlike Rosie, Krista has the opportunity to participate in many sports and activities not limited by her gender. She keeps busy with dance team, tennis, homework, and working part time. In compliance with school dress code, Krista dresses conservatively, usually in a t-shirt and jeans. Hanging out with friends is the weekend routine. Drinking, although something she has avoided, is around, with little problem of violence or drugs at her small high school.

Rosie, having seen seven sons through high school and playing a big role in the lives of her grandchildren, thinks that it is harder for kids today than in the forties, "because without college it is so difficult to find a meaningful job, there is so much pressure to perform." The high school experiences of Rosie and Krista show that over the years much has changed, much remains the same, and these two southern Illinois girls both worked very hard to succeed. [From Georgia Engelke, *Looking Back at Granite City's Heritage 1801 -1993; A History of Granite City Steel...Since 1878; History of Granite City. 1896 -1946. Volume 1.* (Granite City, Ill Public Library); Student Historian's interview of Krista Frey, (Sept.13, 2004); Student Historian's interview of Rosalie Stern, (Sept.12, 2004).]